

Tailor

Cut, fit and alter clothes so they sit right on a real body. A hand skill you learn by doing.

TYPICAL PAY

\$41,640

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$30k to \$64k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Alteration shops, bridal and menswear stores, dry cleaners, th...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
Family and consumer sciences, art, and any textile or costume class. Start making things now, badly, and keep going.
- 2 Learn the machine** 6 months to 2 years
A community college certificate, a fashion program, or a patient relative and a lot of hours. Straight seams, zippers, buttonholes, linings.
- 3 First job doing alterations** 1 to 2 years
Bridal shops, menswear stores and dry cleaners hire beginners and teach fitting. This is where you get fast.
- 4 Fitting and cutting** 2 to 5 years
Reading a body, pinning a fit, and eventually cutting a garment from a pattern you drafted yourself. This is the skill that separates a tailor from a sewer.
- 5 Specialize or open a shop** Ongoing
Bespoke menswear, bridal, leather, costume, or your own alterations business.

Pros and cons

- + You can start with almost no debt and be paid while you learn
- + A real hand skill that takes years to copy
- + Easy to run as your own small business from a shopfront or a spare room
- Pay is low for the first few years and the middle of the field is modest
- The number of these jobs is shrinking as clothes get cheaper to replace than to fix
- Sitting hunched at a machine wears out necks, shoulders and eyes

Optional boosts

Bespoke menswear. Bridal. Leather and outerwear. Costume for stage and screen.

Good to know

The job is shrinking, not disappearing

About 38,800 people worked as tailors, dressmakers and custom sewers in 2024, and the federal projection has that number falling slightly through 2034. Roughly 5,000 openings still come up each ye...

The trade group is older than the light bulb

The Custom Tailors and Designers Association was founded in Columbus, Ohio in 1880 and calls itself the oldest continuously operating trade organization in the United States.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Tailors, Dressmakers, and Custom Sewers (51-6052.00)

O*NET OnLine: Tailors, Dressmakers, and Custom Sewers

Custom Tailors and Designers Association of America

Fashion Institute of Technology: Menswear

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/tailor>



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